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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a curriculum development project at the Hobbema Reserves, Alberta, Canada, whose locus is conceived as situated at the interface of the dominant society and the minority, native Indian society. The project's 2 objectives are (1) to produce and develop instructional materials and plans for the local Reserves school and (2) to engage the total community in involved activity in the project work. The project looks to "devolution," defined as a process of power reallocation in such a way that the identifiable group situated outside the headquarters feels free to act without the constraints of some hierarchy, rather than "deconcentration," defined as a process of allocating authority for specific functions within an hierarchical structure to an identifiable group situated outside headquarters, as a viable operative value in bringing about "decentralized" control over curricular content. At issue is the character of the relationship between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Canada) and the Reserves people. The paper highlights operational principles adopted, some of the concrete activities undertaken, and American Indian perceptions of project activities as they moved through the several phases of developmental work over the initial 10 months. It concludes with the note that the curriculum development work is viewed as a significant step towards the larger issue of local autonomy over educational matters. (Author/FF)

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TOWARDS DEVOLUTION IN THE CONTROL OF EDUCATION ON A NATIVE RESERVE IN ALBERTA

THE HOBBEMA CURRICULUM STORY

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ABSTRACT

Towards Devolution in the Control of Education on a Native Reserve in Alberta: The Hobbema Curriculum Story

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The paper describes a curriculum development project at the Hobbema Reserves, Alberta, Canada, whose locus is conceived as situated at the interface between the dominant society and the minority, native Indian society. The project's twin objectives are (1) to produce and develop instructional materials and instructional plans for the local Reserves school, and (2) to this end, to engage the total community in involved activity in the project work. The project looks to "devolution" rather than "deconcentration" as a viable operative value in bringing about "decentralized" control over curricular content. At issue here is the character of the relationship between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Canada) and the Reserves people. The paper highlights operational principles adopted, some of the concrete activities undertaken, and native perceptions of project activities as they moved through the several phases of developmental work over the initial ten months. It concludes with the note that the curriculum development work is viewed as a significant step towards the larger issue of local autonomy over educational matters.

> Many of us Indian parents had at one time or another dreamed about a project where Indian people themselves could sit down to write their own history, their legends -- in other words, their own culture -- to teach their own children. Today we are doing just that.
>
> -- Theresa Wildcat, Chairman of the School Committee on the Hobbema Reserves --

These were the words Theresa Wildcat, Chairman of the School Committee of the Hobbema Reserves, told educators assembled in Banff for the Alberta Indian Education Association Convention two months ago.

Fifty miles south of Edmonton, Alberta, on the Hobbema Indian Reserves are a group of concerned people -- native parents, native students and teachers -- who have been vitally involved in community curriculum development. With a focus and emphasis on the participation of the Reserves people to bring about changes in the content of the educational program of their children, this developmental effort goes by the name, the Hobbema Curriculum Project.

The Hobbema Reserves is the general name given to four continguous reserves (Louis Bull, Ermineskin, Montana and Samson) established in 1876 by Treaty No. 6. Unique in Canada, these four reserves are bound together in a single administrative body called the Four Band Council. Under the aegis of this Council functions the School Committee with representation from each of the four

reserves. At the geographic centre stands Ermineskin School, the Reserves' Elementary and Junior High School, whose 800 students and 45 teachers are following the Alberta Department of Education curriculum.

The foregoing is one way of describing the site of the curriculum development project to which Mrs. Wildcat referred. The locus of this activity may be more meaningfully described, however, in another way. It can be described as a domain situated at the interface between two cultures, the dominant non-native culture and a minority ethnic culture. In recent years this region of the interface has been characterized by disequilibrium.

The Hobbema Curriculum Project is NOT designed as a study about native culture. Many natives here, as on many reserves elsewhere in North America, have exhausted their patience with socio-cultural studies that grace the researchers' shelves. They want, in return for the input they provide, visible payoff that accrue more directly to the benefit of their own people. The Hobbema Curriculum Project is not a research project of the traditional cut; it is a developmental project in which community action is crucial and whose action is directed towards the following intended payoffs for the Reserves:

(1) change in the curriculum content and instructional materials content of the Reserves school to accommodate educational goals defined by the people of Hobbema, goals which emerge from the community's socio-cultural context; and

(2) change in the process of curriculum development such that the process accommodates meaningful involvement of the Reserves' community of parents, students and teachers. It is believed that such meaningful involvement will provide opportunities to accommodate the community's socio-cultural imperatives.

Perceived in this way, the Hobbema Curriculum Project falls within anthropologist George M. Foster's definition of the sub-discipline of applied anthropology, (Foster, 1969:39-71) wherein the target community's change of behavior is deemed to be the main thrust of the project activity. In such an action-oriented project geared to reaching specific goals, Foster indicates the need of attending to not only the technical task of construction of the curriculum but also the socio-cultural imperatives that emerge from the cultural context. We concur that community action curriculum development necessitates a consideration of the context within which social action takes place.

The formal agreement between the Reserves and Federal Government on educational matters dates back to the signing of Treaty No. 6 in 1876, a contractual agreement between the Crees and the representatives of the Crown that "the Queen would maintain a school" on each reserve "as long as the sun shines and yonder river flows". Hence, in Canada, whereas by Section 92 of the B. N. A. Act, the matter of education in general is assigned to the provinces, as far as Indian education is concerned, responsbility by virtue of Section 91 has rested with the Federal Government. As far as reserve schools are concerned,

through a series of agreements between the federal and provincial governments, education has become the joint business of both levels of government. For instance, at Hobbema, financial and administrative matters pertaining to education are concerns generally of the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs; the nature of the curriculum and inspection of teachers are concerns generally of the Alberta Department of Education.

A point to be noted here is that whereas the typical non-reserve schools come under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, reserve schools come under the jurisdiction of both the provincial and federal governments, thereby adding to the complexity of the context within which education must go on and changes must take place.

In this region of the interface between these two Departments on the one hand and the Reserves on the other there appears to be a basic disquiet. This disquiet can be examined, at least in part, in terms of two views of the process usually referred to as decentralization.

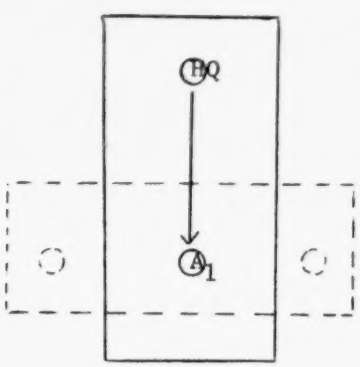
In recent years efforts have been directed by both Departments to encourage decentralization of authority. For instance, the Department of Education of Alberta has been involving teachers in increasing numbers in the construction of public school curricula. In the case of Social Studies, innovations now allow a part of the year's work to be designed solely by teachers and their students. This sort of development can be viewed as decentralization of the

curriculum building authority. In the case of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, there have been many instances of encouragement for reserve people to move towards locally initiated activities. The DIA has been delegating authority in a program of decentralization, particularly concerning local needs that could be met in local ways.

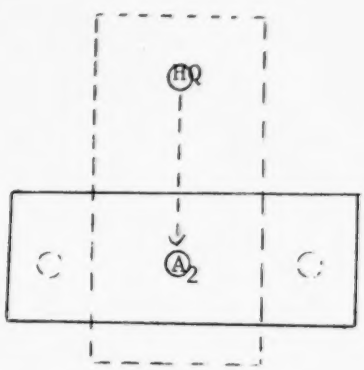
In connection with the notion of decentralization, Frank P. Sherwood (1969:60-87) provides what I find to be a useful concept. He views "decentralization for development" in terms of two variant processes: (1) deconcentration and (2) devolution (See Figure 1).

DECENTRALIZATION

DECONCENTRATION



DEVOLUTION



A_1 and A_2 are groups outside headquarters (HQ). Solid lines indicate strength of influence, vertical or horizontal.

Figure 1

Without altering the basic configuration Sherwood offers, deconcentration can be interpreted as the process of allocating authority for specific functions within an hierarchical structure to an identifiable group situated outside headquarters. In this type of decentralization, the group is or feels directly constrained in their decision making by the presence of the influence of the hierarchical structure. In contrast, devolution is defined as a process of power reallocation in such a way that the identifiable group situated outside the headquarters feels free to act without the constraints of some hierarchy. Hence, in devolution, the group demonstrates a strong feeling of integrity in the sense that a system must have boundaries and therefore identity.

A group whose power is achieved through devolution is self-governing, possessing generally agreed upon functional limits of activity. As an integral system in transactional relationship with its environment, its activity is production-oriented rather than consumption-oriented. It possesses capabilities to receive information through transaction with its environment, to process the information, and to direct its activities towards goals it itself generates.

A rather pithy point is made by P. H. Wichern (1972:17) in his recent study of the Political Development on Canadian Reserves. He has observed that whereas "Canadian local government reflects devolution of responsibilities as a characteristic of the national political culture, reserves are governed under a deconcentration system which is at variance with the notion of participation and equality. Hence, on reserves the cultural promise of devolution

exists along with a reality of deconcentration." Wichern sees here a contradiction between the promise and the reality. This contradiction may explain why some Indians speak of the Unjust Society (Cardinal: 1969).

Devolution as a process does not necessarily mean, however, the severance of the relationship between the reserves and the Department of Indian Affairs; it calls for rather the construction of a viable transform in the relationship between the two, one which views the Department as a facilitator and supporter of the movement towards participatory democracy and as a guarantor of the entrenched Indian rights such as treaty and aboriginal rights, as well as protection of their land base.

The Hobbema Curriculum Project was conceived along devolutionary lines, convinced that community or local curriculum development to be meaningful to the people of the community must be based on autonomy of action. To trigger the movement for social action in curriculum development on the Reserves along devolutionary lines, we as a mediating team of two moved into this domain of the interface between the Department and the Reserves, in touch <u>with</u> but <u>outside</u> the Department of Indian Affairs and not <u>of</u> but <u>in close contact with</u> the Reserves. We see this mediating role as a limited, <u>ad hoc</u> self-destruct kind, to have organizational life only for the duration of the need for the mediating role.

Accordingly, we received support and encouragement of the Edmonton Regional Office of the Department of Indian Affairs, and

through them the support of the Ottawa office. Hence, in presenting a proposal to the Four Band Council of Hobbema for a social action oriented curriculum developmental program, we were able to state:

> we submit this proposal based on the assurance that if the Hobbema Curriculum Project is approved by the people of Hobbema, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will provide the money for the workshops, travel expenses, consultants, materials and equipment necessary to develop the instructional materials and instructional strategies. The officials of the Department further gave us assurance that they will not set control on activities decided upon by the people of Hobbema.

As a condition of the approval of the project, it was agreed that all curriculum materials become the property of the Four Band Council, requiring the Council's release for distribution beyond the confines of the Reserves.

The project emphasized the centrality of native enunciation of curriculum goals and of meaningful native involvement. Hence the proposal read in part:

> This proposal is based on the premise that the central function of education is to enhance the humanness of all human beings and that the development of humanness can be accomplished only if we respect the uniqueness of each ethnic group and of each individual student.

If further stated:

> Our basic proposal is to involve the parents of Hobbema schools in discussing and in determining what they want in their own schools. These wants, we are sure, will reflect the innermost and deepest concerns of those most closely connected with the educational program in Hobbema. Thus, we expect that the decision as to the goals and objectives of schooling will be made mainly by the people of Hobbema.

Hence, in launching the Curriculum Project, we were guided by certain operational principles.

(1) As the first principle, we adopted early the notion of maximum participating involvement of the people of Hobbema. We defined "the people of Hobbema" to mean the following sub-populations of the Reserves:

a. the Band Council, the School Committee and parents,

b. students attending Ermineskin School and students attending integrated schools outside Hobbema,

c. administrators and teachers of Ermineskin School.

In all activities of the project, representation from these three sub-populations have been sought.

(2) The second operating principle established was an outgrowth of the rejection of the notion of an imposed curriculum developed by external experts. We adopted the principle that the people who are affected should be the main decision-makers in determining curriculum goals and content and also that these people as a group with some consultative assistance can do the job of curriculum building.

(3) The third principle was based on the concept that in determining goal areas, the wants and wishes of the people of Hobbema must be respected.

These principles are reflected in a statement made by a native member early in the project work who said:

> If I am aware that someone is trying to change me, I am very reluctant to change, but if I know no one is trying to do this, I will do anything to change myself.

Another native participant put the goal of the project team as follows:

> The project realizes the importance of identity and self-image. This program is a search for identity.

This statement reflects the participant's general goal orientation in the curriculum project. Guided by this overarching goal, at the first major workshop held in January of this year, the participants identified four target areas:

(1) the history of the people of Hobbema

(2) local government at Hobbema

(3) geographic and socio-economic description of Hobbema

(4) selected cultural aspects of Hobbema.

Our workshop, which one member referred to as "the first workshop of its kind", was in a way a test of the workability of the community approach to curriculum development in Hobbema. It is revealing to note perceptions of the native participants of the workshop. Here are a few:

(1) "The best approach so far in trying to form a section in the curriculum on the native people."

(2) "This workshop has become a real communication between people (teachers, students, parents) who perhaps were strangers before. People have expressed their true feelings, attitudes, etc. to each other."

(3) "I want to do my part in this project. The world hardly has any true written documents of our culture and we need them. Our children need this knowledge."

(4) "A rare and useful experience. . . .all groups involved in the school process have been involved."

(5) "It really opened my eyes and concern about my people. I do this for my people; I am one of them."

The positive feedback of the participants provided us impetus to move further in the direction set.

We have had dozens of meetings since -- in small groups and in large, and in all group meetings we have been insisting upon wherever possible involvement of parents, students and teachers.

From February to August of this year, has been a period of exploration and development of instructional materials. Individually, in groups small and large, many things were done. A two day August workshop devoted to identifying what had been accomplished led to a long list of curriculum materials and resources at various stages of completion, and with varying degrees of appropriateness. So many were there that the group decided on priorities and manner of disposition. The list contained items such as the following:

(1) "The legend of the Prairie Chicken" to be developed as children's stories by the end of September.

(2) "Wee-sha-ke-chak Stories" as told in Cree by natives of Hobbema, translated and transformed into an illustrated book for children -- by the end of December.

(3) "The Legend of the Peace Pipe" as told by Joe Saddleback, to be developed as follows:

Narration with pictures on VTR,
Sets of Picture Cards, plasticized, to be used by children to compose their own stories,
Slides of 26 illustrations of Peace Pipe legend.

(4) Complete an instructional plan for a 6 week unit entitled "Who Came First" (Discovery of America - Six Interpretations).

Teachers manual - 1st draft completed
Student resource book of documents and articles
Instructional materials - 6 sets of slides (one for each interpretation), sets of transparencies, large anthropological study map.
Prototype of 1 class set to be completed by the end of November.

(5) A Social Commentary by Indians through cartoons and editorials, ready by end of December.

These are just a few of the kinds of products that reflect the substance of the curriculum effort to date and the kinds of instructional materials that are being developed.

At the present moment, the focus of energy is on instructional planning. Teachers are contributing extensively working with parents and students, fitting together the three basic components of any instructional plan: goals and objectives; instructional materials and teaching strategies and tactics (Aoki, 1970). This phase, instructional planning, is demanding much effort, including the translation of general goal area statements into specific objectives sufficiently directive to provide guidance to instructional planning; identifying, arranging and developing multi-media displays as instructional materials; and developing alternative ways of teaching using the instructional materials developed.

Curriculum development is not an isolated activity as some curriculum literature seem to suggest. It is a very human and social activity. And as in any group project, there are moments of productivity and moments of non-productivity; there are moments of warm, friendly relationship and there are moments of disruptions and cool non-relationship. Through all these experiences, however, in our project there is emerging a curriculum with which the natives, both parents and students, can identify. There is also emerging a new relationship among the people of Hobbema. For example, parents, students and school personnel, are often immersed and engaged in shared dialogue

concerning education. Moreover, there is developing, we are sure, a new confidence in their own capabilities in coping with problems involved in curriculum development.

However, we see the community action curriculum development to be only a step, albeit a significant step towards the larger issue of local school autonomy.

In fact, the logical outcome of the path of devolution in educational matters at Hobbema can be viewed as the Reserves people's control of the total educational process.

The people in Hobbema have indicated their concern in this area by adopting just two weeks ago a proposal for another project (Project Study of Local Autonomy at Hobbema) whose fundamental objective is

> "to enable the people of Hobbema to make a careful study of alternative ways in which they might develop and organize educational facilities, and develop mechanisms for the control of the operation of educational programs involving, children, youths and adults of their reserves."

The proposal further states that

> "the project is based on the premise that before the people of Hobbema make any firm decision regarding local school control, it is desirable that there be a comprehensive and systematic exploration and identification of alternative ways of organizing themselves for school control at the local level."

In this new project, as in the curriculum project, the Edmonton regional office of the Department of Indian Affairs has provided assurance of support. This together with the Four Band Council's acceptance of the proposal enables us to mediate in activities which involve making a study themselves of alternative ways of school control in which they

might construct new relationships with the Department of Indian Affairs, the Provincial Department of Education, the school systems external to their reserves, and other educational agencies. The project calls for active involvement of the people of Hobbema in giving shape in the area of education to their own aspirations, to their own transactional relationships between the Reserves and their non-reserve world, and to design, in a way, their own unique native life-styles (Aoki, 1972).

I have examined very briefly both the Hobbema Curriculum Project and Project Study of Local School Autonomy at Hobbema. They are illustrative of the attempt to operationalize the concept of devolution as Frank P. Sherwood postulated. We see in this process possibilities for the construction anew of a viable relationship at the interface between two groups in Canadian society - the dominant non-native people and the people at Hobbema. At this interface and in this process we see potential for desired changes to come about, changes which the people of Hobbema themselves in their own wisdom can determine and are determining.

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